

# MTSU SIDELINES

COVID-19 EDITION | 05.04.20 | Vol.97 | No.2



Hanan Beyene in Osaka, Japan. (Photo courtesy of Hanan Beyene)

## STUDENT, INTERRUPTED: MTSU JUNIOR HANAN BEYENE FACES IMPACT OF COVID-19 ABROAD

By Savannah Meade

Third-year MTSU student Hanan Beyene landed in Japan in mid-January while COVID-19 was only in the back of the minds of most Americans. Nearly two months later she was on a plane heading back to America due to growing concerns about coronavirus.

As a global and religious studies double major, Beyene traveled to Japan to take peace studies classes. She lived in a dorm in Osaka along with students from other countries as well as MTSU. While this wasn't Beyene's first time in the country, she said the new experience

of being in Japan for a class and for longer than two weeks was exciting.

"Even a month in, I was like 'I'm in Japan, this is weird.' Like you're still trying to process... The entire time I was there was super exciting. And it was all things I was kind of familiar with, but it was new because I was there as a full-time student as opposed to a short-term type of trip. So, I liked it a lot. It was really, like, the best time for me."

But soon, it was becoming impossible for the world to ignore the increasing threat of COVID-19...

Continued on page 04

## COVID-19 BY THE NUMBERS

### STUDENT JOURNALISTS BREAKING THROUGH THE DATA, ONE DAY AT A TIME

Nearly a month ago, MTSU announced the rocky shift from on-campus instruction to remote learning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Schedules were flipped, students were shuffled and a general air of panic settled in. But amidst it all, student journalists persevered.

Two such journalists—Ashley Perham and Zoe Haggard, both seniors in the College of Media and Entertainment—responded to the change with methodical determination.

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(Photo courtesy of Nicole Alexander)

## STUDENTS PETITION FOR PARTIAL TUITION REFUND

Following the move to remote learning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, MTSU senior Elijah Dangerfield created a Change.org petition calling for partial tuition reimbursement for the Spring 2020 semester. That petition now has almost 4,000 signatures.

The petition, entitled "(MTSU) Partial tuition reimbursement for online classes from COVID-19 side effects," entails the frustrations of losing quality in-class time as well as the disparities online classes create for lower-income students.

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## PARTING GLASS, INTERRUPTED:

One final toast from your Editor-in-Chief

Read on page 16

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

This has certainly been an adventure, hasn't it? I know that I wished for a nice, long spring break, but a pandemic is certainly not what I or anyone had in mind.

I would like to extend my most sincere condolences to anyone who has lost a relative or friend from this virus—my thoughts, prayers, and good vibes are with you. To my fellow 2020 spring graduates, I'm so sorry that we have been robbed of our final semester, our final experiences and our final moments. Hopefully we can all gather once more in the fall to celebrate the end of this nightmare.

To all MTSU students, I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the opportunity to bring you quality journalism for the past three years: first as a reporter, then as News Editor, and finally, Editor-in-Chief. It has been the pleasure of a lifetime, and I hope you enjoy this semester's final "print" edition, which will be the last I bring you before passing on the torch.

This is a difficult, unprecedented time for many of us, but we will get through it together. Stay strong, stay home and stay safe. In the meantime, if you need someone to talk to, please do not hesitate to reach out to MTSU's Counseling Services at (615) 898-2670. If you do not wish to call, please check out their site at <https://www.mtsu.edu/countest/index.php> to learn more about their current availability.

Stay strong, y'all. We've got this.



# MEET - THE - CREW

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*Continued from Page 1:*

# STUDENT, INTERRUPTED: MTSU JUNIOR HANAN BEYENE FACES IMPACT OF COVID-19 ABROAD

By Savannah Meade

*(Cont.)* Beyene said she was contacted by the study-abroad office at MTSU at the end of February and was given the option to stay in Japan or return home.

However, life in Japan hadn't changed that much. Beyene said there was already a culture of wearing masks, even just for fashion, which had led to her purchasing face masks when she arrived. And the Japanese government hadn't taken any drastic precautions against COVID-19. Businesses and schools were still open and people gathered freely. So Beyene chose to stay.

In fact, Beyene said that she felt safer in Japan.

"It was really weird because I remember a lot of people back home were panicking and freaking out about (COVID-19). And I wasn't really getting that same vibe in Japan, so I felt safe. I was like, 'oh, no one's really panicking. It seems like things are kind of under control,'" she said.

However, it turned out the Japanese government had been under-testing like many other countries and many felt that the government did not do as well as they could've to tackle the virus. It seemed to many that the government was holding out for as long as possible for fear of canceling the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, which has since been postponed. Once the real numbers of cases in Japan started coming out, it got more serious. Japan now has over 13,000 confirmed cases and Osaka accounts for over 1,500 of them – the second-most in the country.

"We would go to the city and there would still be a lot of people and Japan is very dense. So, we just felt like something's not adding up. Because it can't be just Japan that is not getting numbers (of cases)," Beyene said.

Beyene said that around the time MTSU President Sidney McPhee released his statement moving the rest of the spring semester online, Japan closed schools at all levels for two weeks.

She said the study abroad office contacted her again at this point. Both MTSU and the university Beyene was studying at in Japan strongly suggested she come home. It was this, paired with the fear for her own health and already losing the cultural experience she had come for, that was the turning point in her decision to go home.

"And that's when we were like we might as well go home," she said. "We came for the experience. And we realized our experience in Japan is different because of this. Because they were canceling cultural events, they were shutting down parks and museums and things like that. And I especially felt like I wasn't getting the full experience I could've."

Coming home, Beyene said, was a mixture of stressful and sad.



*Beyene in Kyoto, Japan. (Photo courtesy of Hanan Beyene)*

“I was really sad this time going back because I was like ‘this is not what I originally planned’ and it was a downer for sure. Last time I came to Japan it was very fulfilling because it was only two weeks and we all had this great experience. And I felt like mine was cut short.”

But the tense feeling in the airport from others traveling concerned about the virus was new to her as well.

“It was really stressful because I could feel other people being stressed out too in the airport... I was like, ‘I just want to go home, I don’t want to deal with this entire process.’ But it went smoothly, it’s just that stressful environment was not great,” Beyene said.

*“I was really sad this time going back because I was like ‘this is not what I originally planned’...And I felt like (my experience) was cut short.”*

After arriving back to the states, Beyene was told by the study abroad office that she needed to quarantine for two weeks to make sure she hadn’t caught coronavirus somewhere on her way home and wasn’t showing symptoms. Beyene ended up staying in a hotel for 14 days and came out of it, thankfully, with no symptoms.



Tokyo, Japan on Monday, April 27, 2020. (Photo courtesy of AP News/Eugene Hoshiko)

Since then, she has been back home continuing her classes in Japan remotely, staying inside and playing the Sims with her study abroad friends.

“I facetime them all the time. Especially since we’re all kind of in quarantine, we’re talking and playing Sims together all the time, and Animal Crossing... It’s also weird because we all have these different time differences. But

we still keep in touch so that’s really fun.”

Beyene said she knows it was the best decision for her health and safety, but it was still a bummer to leave. She plans to go back to Japan and get the experience she missed out on.

“I miss it so much. And looking towards grad or after bachelors... I’d be interested in going back to Japan in some way,” she said. “I love Japan with my whole heart. I miss it so much.”

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# HELD SERVE: HOW MTSU MEN'S TENNIS IS DEALING WITH COVID-19

By Nathan Vaughan



(Photo of Coach Jim Borendame courtesy of MT Men's Tennis)

The week of Spring Break was supposed to be a time for the MTSU men's tennis team to get in crucial outdoor tennis practice and matches in Houston. But in a whirlwind of 48 hours, the Blue Raiders' hopes to finish the 2020 spring season with a bang were dashed by the outbreak of COVID-19 and the subsequent cancellation of all NCAA sports for the semester.

"I happened to be exercising and just kinda reacted a bit (on Twitter to the news) because my team found out at the same time I found out, and I really wanted the chance to talk to the guys," said MTSU Head Coach Jimmy Borendame.

By the next week, plans were in motion to figure out where each member of the diverse and international roster of the Blue Raiders was headed.

"We have three guys still in Murfreesboro. For some of the guys from Europe, it was safer for them to stay here. So we have a couple on and off-campus and a few other guys have made it home," Borendame said.

Borendame went on to say he was scheduling Zoom meetings to help stay in touch with his team and keep an eye on their progress as they try to stay fit for a possible fall season.

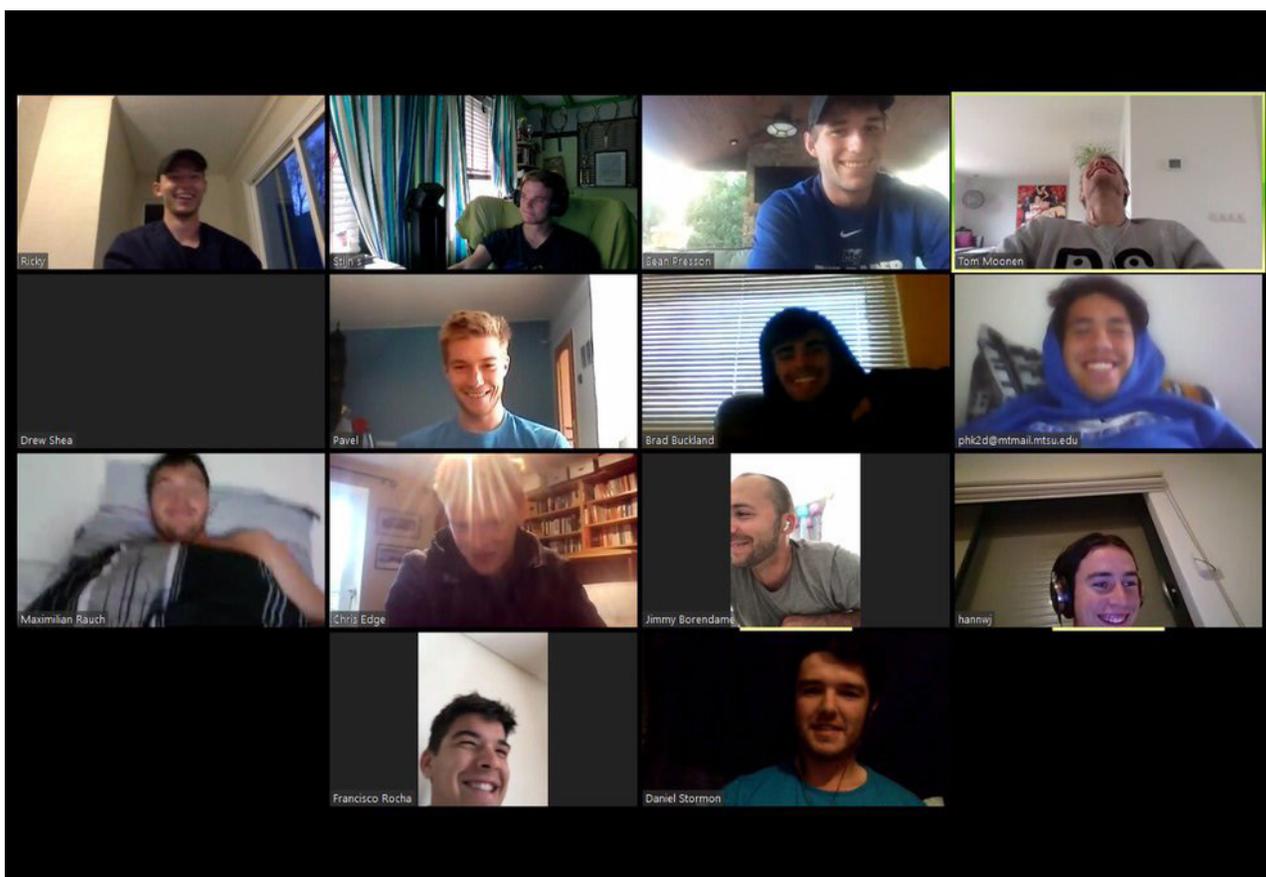
But for the senior class that had their season cut short, it seems the recent NCAA decision to allow waivers for spring sports senior athletes to receive an extra year of eligibility will be a major boon to next year's Blue Raider roster.

"Everybody has been very excited to stay at Middle Tennessee. Right now I have the commitment from Tom (Moonen) and Max (Rauch) to return. It makes me feel good that these guys want to continue with our program," Borendame said.

With the retention of some of the Blue Raiders top players, it seems that next season will feature one of the strongest MTSU men's tennis teams ever as Coach Borendame builds the program for even higher standards in the future.

"Right now I feel the team is loaded. I think there are a few teams that had seniors and they could almost be superteams. But spring sports across the board should be super strong next year," Borendame said.

For this quarantine period, Borendame said he will work with his training staff at MTSU to help coordinate and make sure every player has a set training regimen fit for what equipment and setup they have to make sure the team stays in peak form. And hopefully, for Blue Raider fans, next spring will bring a great product on the hard courts for MT. But as a silver lining, at least MTSU will remain the defending Conference USA champions for another year.



"Quarantined, but all smiles catching up with these guys. Miss them," said Borendame on Twitter, referencing the pictured team Zoom call. (Photo courtesy of Jim Borendame)



(Illustration courtesy of Ikumi Kajisa)

By Toriana Williams

Amongst the seemingly never ending COVID-19 crisis, politics never rest.

Recently, front running Democratic candidates Elizabeth Warren, Pete Buttigeg and Bernie Sanders dropped from the presidential race. All three former candidates endorsed the current leading candidate Joe Biden, who was vice president for Barack Obama from 2009 to 2017.

During the primary election up to this point, Biden has gained 1,312 delegates. However, due to the coronavirus, many states have postponed and/or pushed the dates of their primary elections.

These states (and territory) include: Alaska, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, West Virginia, Wyoming and Puerto Rico.

With the primary election still pending, along with local elections, voting rights advocates and many Democrats are encouraging states to switch to postal voting to avoid the spread of Covid-19.

Postal voting is a voting method in which ballot papers are distributed to citizens and are

returned through mail. Despite it appearing like a feasible solution to the issue of social-distancing at polls, many have voiced strong opinions against it.

Harmeet Dhillon, lawyer and Republican party official, raised concerns about ballot security and voter fraud in an opinion column with the Daily Caller.

“Any person would be allowed to return an unlimited number of absentee ballots for voters and could even be paid as long as he or she is not paid based on the number of ballots returned,” he said.

Vote At Home, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that is dedicated to ensuring the security of elections and putting voters’ needs first, stated, “Voters get their ballot delivered to them weeks before Election Day, fill it out at their convenience, then return it either in-person or by mail. The system has proven to be highly secure, and engages more voters, while significantly lowering costs.”

Regardless of whether or not it's a good idea, many voters have started voting by mail already.

Only time will tell how 2020’s voting will unfold.

## UPCOMING EVENTS:

### MAY:

**Caucuses:** Guam

**Primaries:** Kansas (D), Nebraska, Oregon, Hawaii (D)

**Conventions:** Wyoming (R)

### JUNE:

**Caucuses:** Virgin Islands (D)

**Primaries:** Delaware, District of Columbia, Indiana, Maryland, Montana, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Puerto Rico, Georgia, West Virginia, Kentucky, New York

### JULY:

**Primaries:** New Jersey, Louisiana

### AUG:

**Primaries:** Connecticut

**Conventions:** (D) (R)

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*Continued from Page 1:*



# MTSU STUDENT'S PETITION FOR PARTIAL TUITION REIMBURSEMENT GROWS

By Maddy Portilla

*(Cont.)* The petition details state, “In addition to the decrease in our level of education, many students are faced with the burden of compromised access to important facilities paid for in their tuition, such as a library with computers and internet access, paid meals at dining halls, and the health clinic.”

The decision to hold spring semester remotely has sparked outrage within portions of the student body. The biggest complaint expressed on the petition’s page has been students saying they are paying tuition for in-person courses but required to complete these same courses online.

One commenter added, “Many students struggle with technology, due dates, and reaching out to instructors for help while taking online classes. The switch to online has affected my daily routine, taking a week out of lecture to prepare, and many students’ GPAs will be affected.”

While the university has responded to the GPA concerns by allowing students the option of accepting Pass or Fail credits for classes—and therefore not affecting a student’s GPA in any way—this does not address the bulk of students’ concerns.

Elijah Dangerfield, the creator of the petition, believes MTSU can take it a step further.

“Students pay for class fees and facilities and many other things that just aren’t able to be used anymore,” he said. “In the end, this simply means students are not getting what they paid for. MTSU has shown that they are willing to help students during these hard times. I believe this is just one more avenue in which MTSU can do that.”

Macy Blake, a sophomore in the graphic design program, expressed her thoughts on the topic.

“I feel like everyone is doing the best they can do, and it is something that needs to be done. But, my education has been affected because a majority of my classes are hands-on.”

*“Students pay for class fees and facilities and many other things that just aren’t able to be used anymore. In the end, this simply means students are not getting what they paid for.”*

While the entire situation is not ideal, MTSU has offered many resources to students, including partial housing and meal plan refunds. It is an adjustment made necessary due to the ever-evolving COVID-19 pandemic that will continue to have an effect on the overall functions of daily life.

There are currently no statements from the university addressing the growing petition, but rather official updates on better accommodating students in any virtual capacity.

For more information regarding educational resources offered by MTSU, visit the Walker Library’s official page for remote services and MTSU’s coronavirus response page here.

See daily updates of Tennessee’s COVID-19 numbers here.

3,972 have signed. Let’s get to 5,000!



drew Vannatta signed 1 day ago

Myra Miller signed 2 days ago

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Elijah Dangerfield (Photo courtesy of Elijah Dangerfield, LinkedIn)

*Continued from Page 1:*

# COVID-19 BY THE NUMBERS

## STUDENT JOURNALISTS BREAKING THROUGH THE DATA, ONE DAY AT A TIME

By Angele Latham

*(Cont.)* Under the instruction of MTSU Associate Professor Dr. Kenneth Blake, the three began Sidelines’ “COVID-19 Data Team,” dutifully covering the rapidly changing pandemic with daily analyses. Scouring sources such as the Tennessee Health Department’s daily graphs to the John Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center world data, Perham, Haggard and Blake tracked the virus’s impact on Tennessee with daily graphs and charts.

“With a pandemic like this, numbers are rapidly changing,” Haggard said. “We came across quite a few roadblocks while endeavoring to update on-the-nose as we have done. Numbers don’t always add up, or websites crash or the data ends up insignificant. But we continue to make the effort to inform our audience because this pandemic has touched a point in everyone’s life. And the best thing is to keep them informed so that they have something concrete to hold on to even though it seems what we know is uncertain.”

Their efforts to inform stem mostly from a “big, messy Google Sheets spreadsheet,” Blake explained, which was later merged with Google My Maps to present the information. Data is updated every afternoon, and the three of them spread the duties out to assist each other.

“We mostly use live data from the Tennessee Department of Health, (including) Tennessee counties’ COVID-19 cases, deaths, hospitalizations, recoveries, as well as the state’s demographic breakdowns by age and race,” Haggard said. “The department updates their

numbers at 2p.m. each day, so we get fresh—and many times pending data—everyday. The data is imported into our spreadsheet where we can make charts or graphs and look directly at changes within the past 24 hours.”

Perham notes that looking at concrete numbers during a crisis is essential to staying calm—and holding authorities accountable.

“Numbers are objective and don’t lie,” she said. “The government can tell you one thing about how the virus is spreading, but the numbers that even they release may tell a different story. Numbers help us keep the government accountable in how they’re dealing with the situation. People may disagree with what the numbers are saying, but they cannot disagree with the numbers themselves.”

***“Numbers are objective and don’t lie. The government can tell you one thing about how the virus is spreading, but the numbers that even they release may tell a different story. Numbers help us keep the government accountable in how they’re dealing with the situation.”***

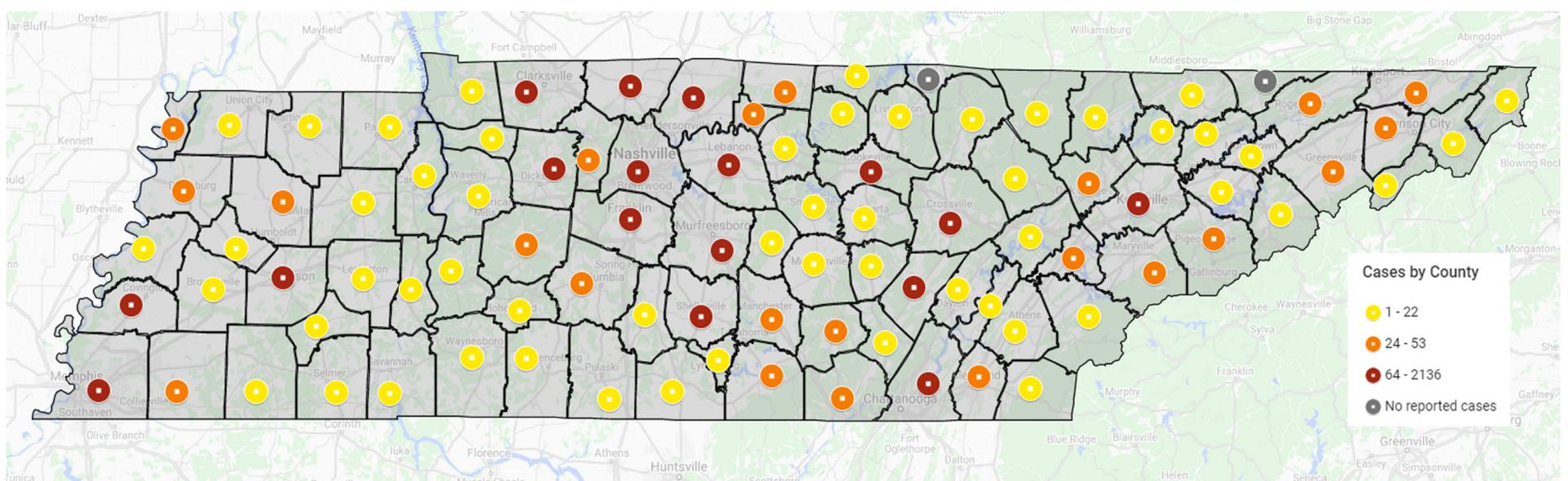
Blake agrees, and believes that reporting raw numbers serves as the front line of coronavirus response.

“Numbers can tell you vital things about a deadly virus, like whether the numbers of people affected by it are rising, holding steady, or falling,” he said. “We know that the numbers we’re reporting aren’t perfect indicators of what coronavirus is doing. They show only what is happening among known cases. Until better, more comprehensive testing becomes available, nobody really knows how many people in Tennessee are carrying the virus, spreading it, and falling ill from it...Crude, imprecise numbers are more informative than no numbers at all, though.”

“It’s a lot of data, but thanks to filtering tools and functions, the otherwise daunting data becomes something that is readable and informative for any audience,” Haggard added. “Also, Dr. Blake is our biggest help.”

Blake, who has commended Haggard and Perham for their tremendous daily work analyzing the updates, admits that he does benefit from this project.

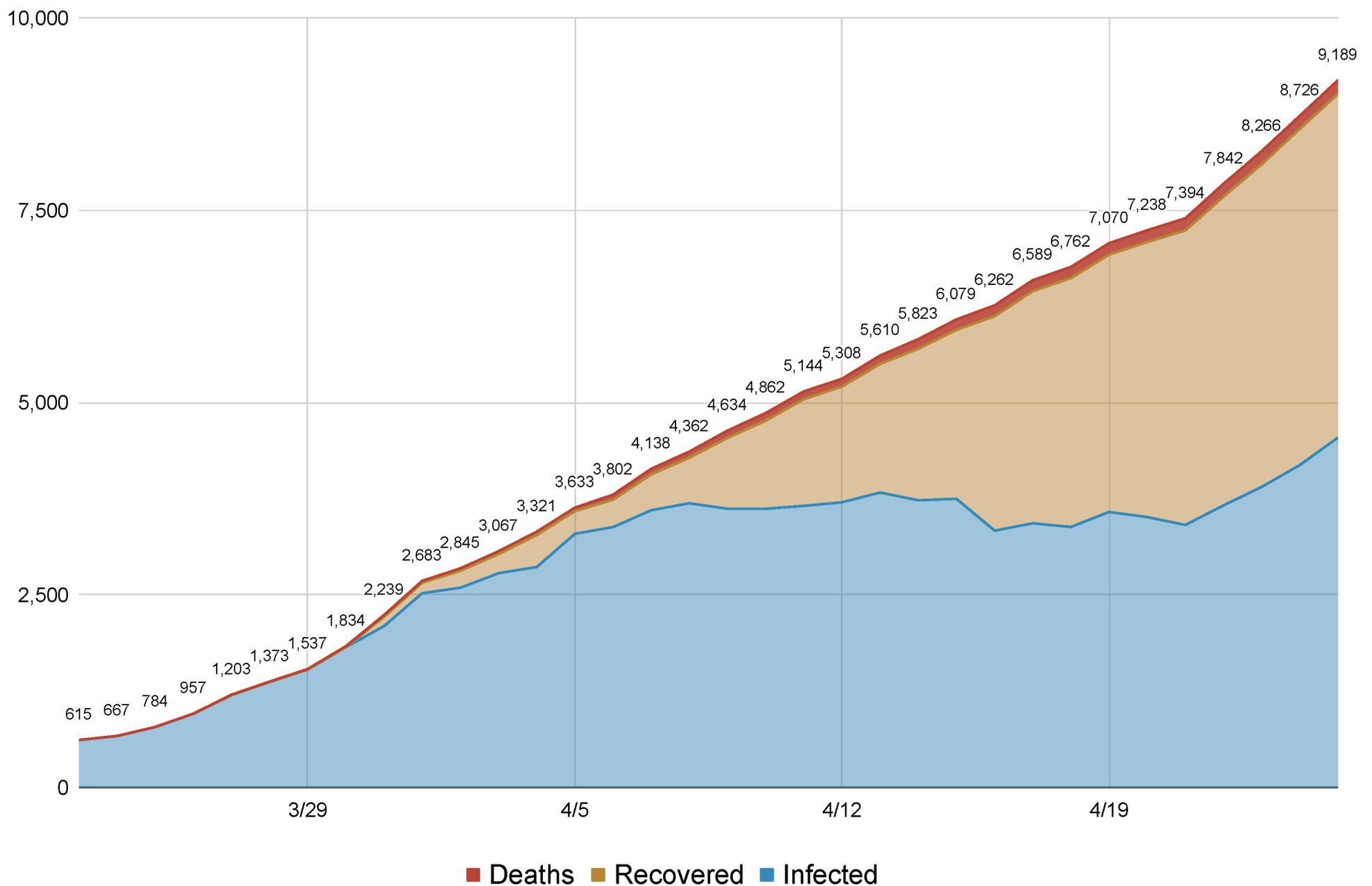
“I’m self-aware enough to realize that tracking these numbers is a coping strategy for me personally,” he said. “The virus is a very real threat, and there are many things about it that I can’t control. But I can track numeric evidence of what the virus is doing, and perhaps that makes me feel a bit safer. It certainly encourages me to be careful, and to follow experts’ advice about social distancing, hand washing, and wearing



Cases per county in Tennessee, from March 23 through April 25. (Graph courtesy of the Sidelines’ COVID-19 Data Team)

# Confirmed COVID-19 Cases in Tennessee

Data source: Tennessee Department of Health daily reports, March 23 through April 25. Counts reflect confirmed cases only.



Above is the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases statewide, according to the Tennessee Department of Health's daily reports for March 23 through April 25. The shaded areas represent the number of cases categorized as deaths (red), recoveries (brown), or active infections (blue). The numbers show the total case count on each given day in the period. (Graph courtesy of Sidelines' COVID-19 Data Team)

a mask in public. I hope others are doing the same.”

Perham expressed similar motivations.

“Before Dr. Blake approached me about working with him to cover the COVID-19 pandemic, I had made my own map showing the spread in Tennessee,” she said. “Honestly, mapping out what was happening gave me a sense of control over something that I obviously had no control of.”

This sense of control and knowledge is an important aspect of data journalism, and this gives student journalists an edge, Blake explains.

“On an immediate, practical level, students need data skills in order to give themselves an edge in the job market after they graduate. Both computing power and digitized data have grown cheap and abundant, but the supply of people who know how to use the former to extract valuable insights from the latter hasn't kept

pace. Data skills are in demand, so having them can make you in demand. On a broader level, data skills help people correctly understand what is happening in the world, and understanding what is happening in the world is critical to the important work of making the world better.”

As Haggard and Perham’s coverage of the virus draws to a close in correspondence with graduation, the up-and-coming reporters both feel that they’ve gained valuable knowledge about journalism in a pandemic world.

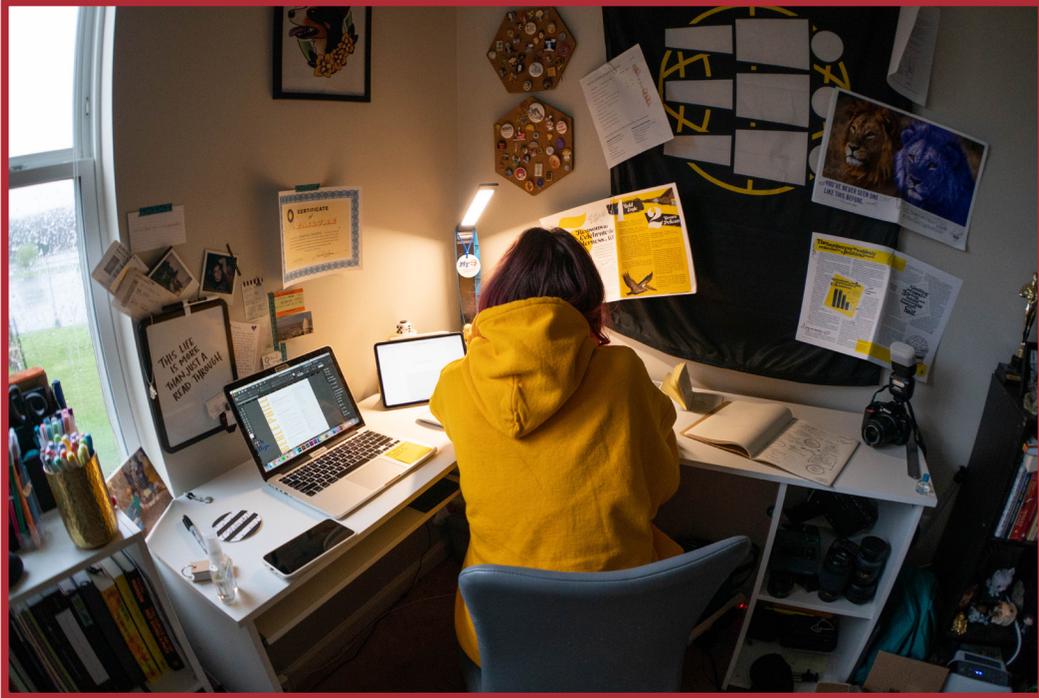
“I’m learning creative ways to present the same data every day,” Perham said. “Everyday we give the number of cases, deaths, hospitalizations and recoveries, but I try to find new data points about these numbers that stick out, like noticing over half of the cases being recovered or presenting data as percentages.”

“Journalism from your home is still journalism, and it should still be taken seriously,” Haggard said. “What I’ve learned the most is that

a serious journalist seldom shies away from reporting when the times are rough and movement is limited. Dr. Blake has inspired me to do so as I've gotten to see first-hand how a journalist like him dedicates his time to reporting for the public's best interest. Dr. Blake truly dedicates his time; I think he even dreams in spreadsheet form.”

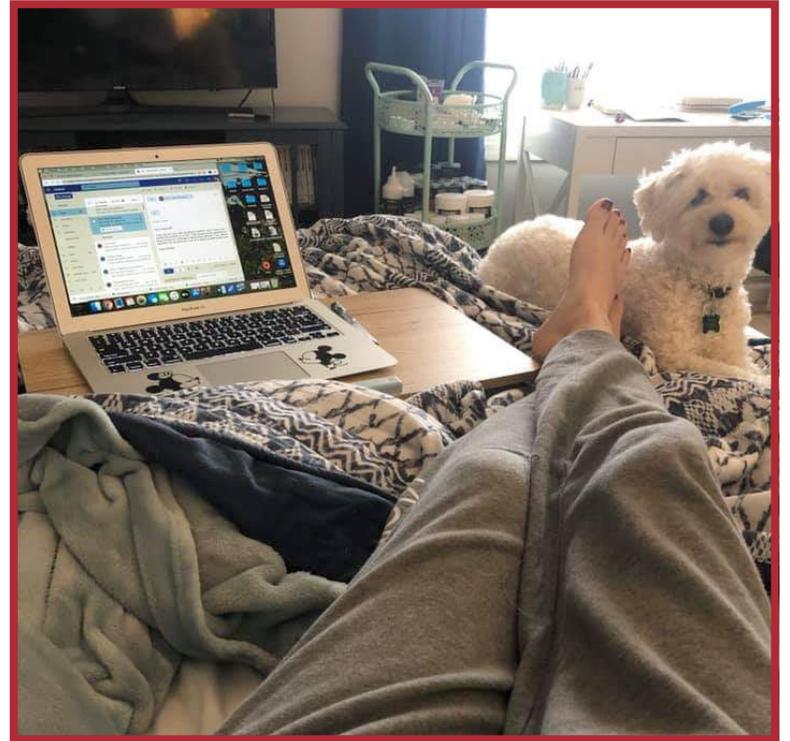
# STUDENTS IN THEIR NATURAL HABITAT

*Lumpy couches? Crowded tables? Noisy siblings and errant cats? This may sound like a nightmare to some people, but for students it's just a day-in-the-life as they attempt to readjust to quarantined learning. Take a look at some of the makeshift classrooms that Blue Raiders are braving, one socially-distant day at a time.*



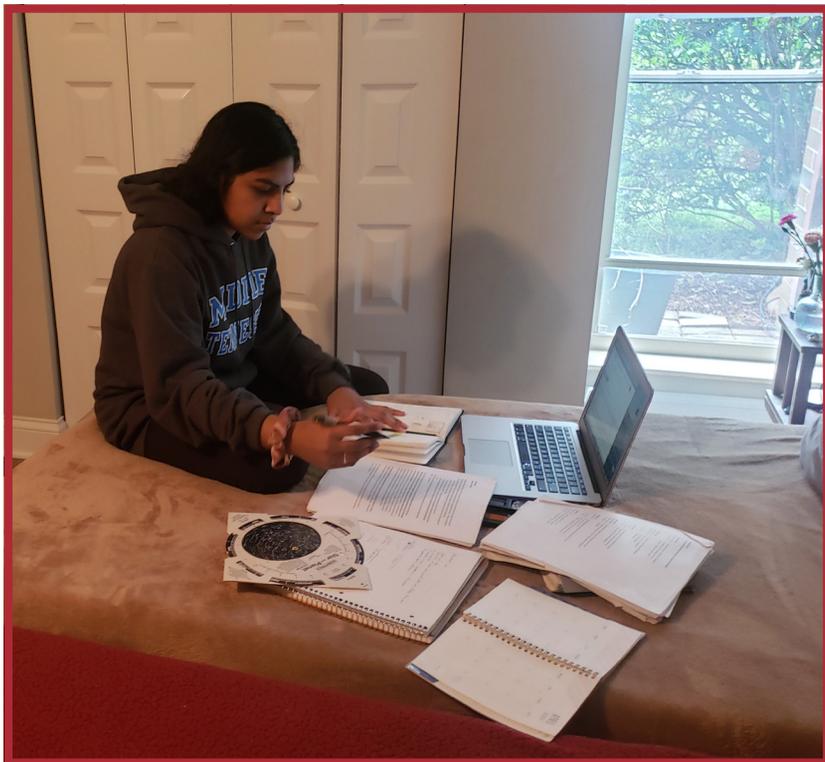
*Amberle Phillips*  
*Senior*

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*"Lap desk, and puppy who always wants attention. And of course, the sweatpants 24/7."*  
*Cayla McNeal*  
*Senior*

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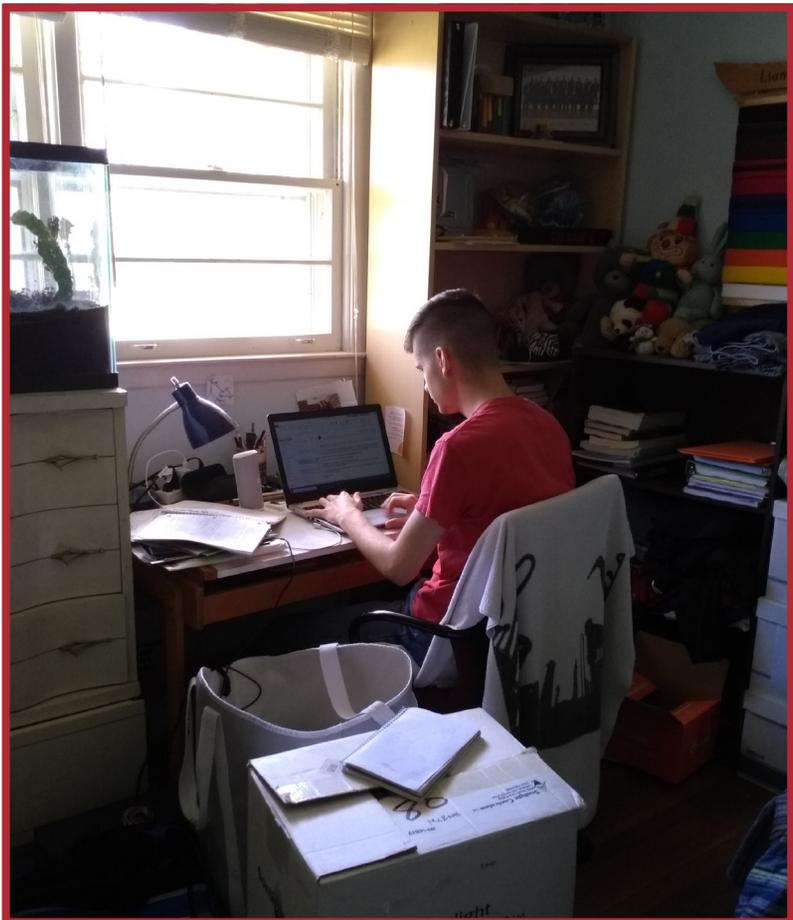
*"From the comfort of my bed, aka, where I'll be all day every day for this semester!"*  
*Gloria Newton*  
*Freshman*

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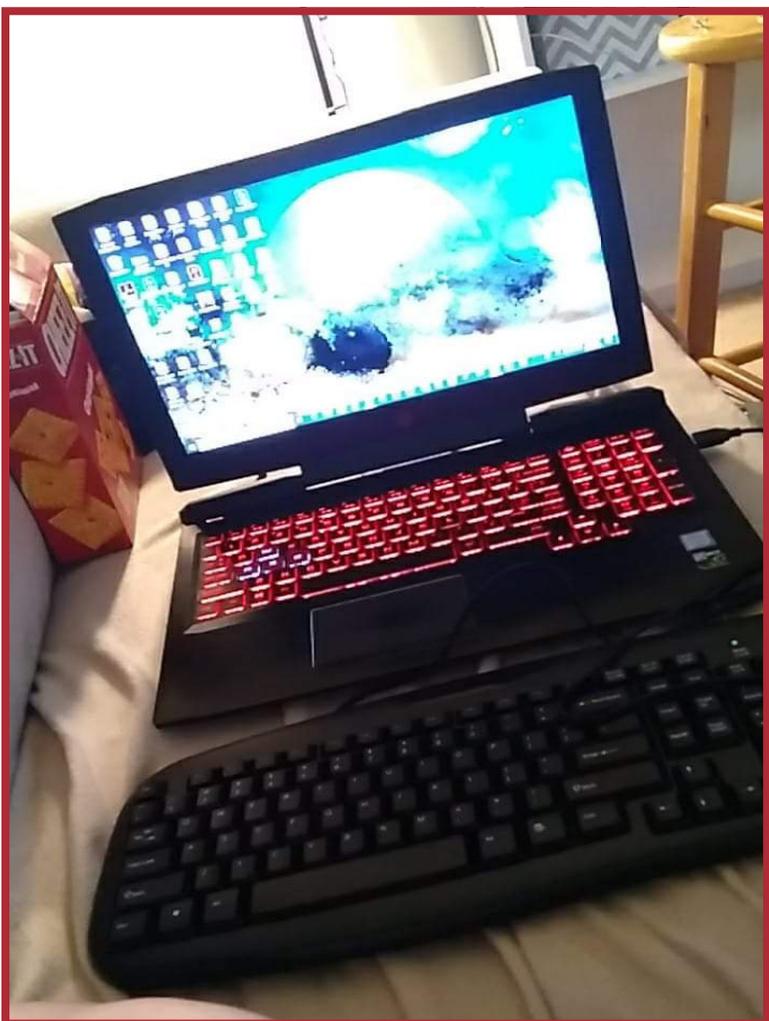


*"I have my 'helper.' (I honestly think she just wanted the Cheeze-Its sitting on the table.)"*  
*Emily Puckett*  
*Senior*

---



**Liam McBane**  
Junior



*"My couch has become my permanent workspace (with obligatory Cheeze-Its). Unfortunately, the E key on my laptop's keyboard broke today, so I had to interrupt myself to dash to Walmart for a cheap temporary one."*

**Michaela Baswell**  
Senior

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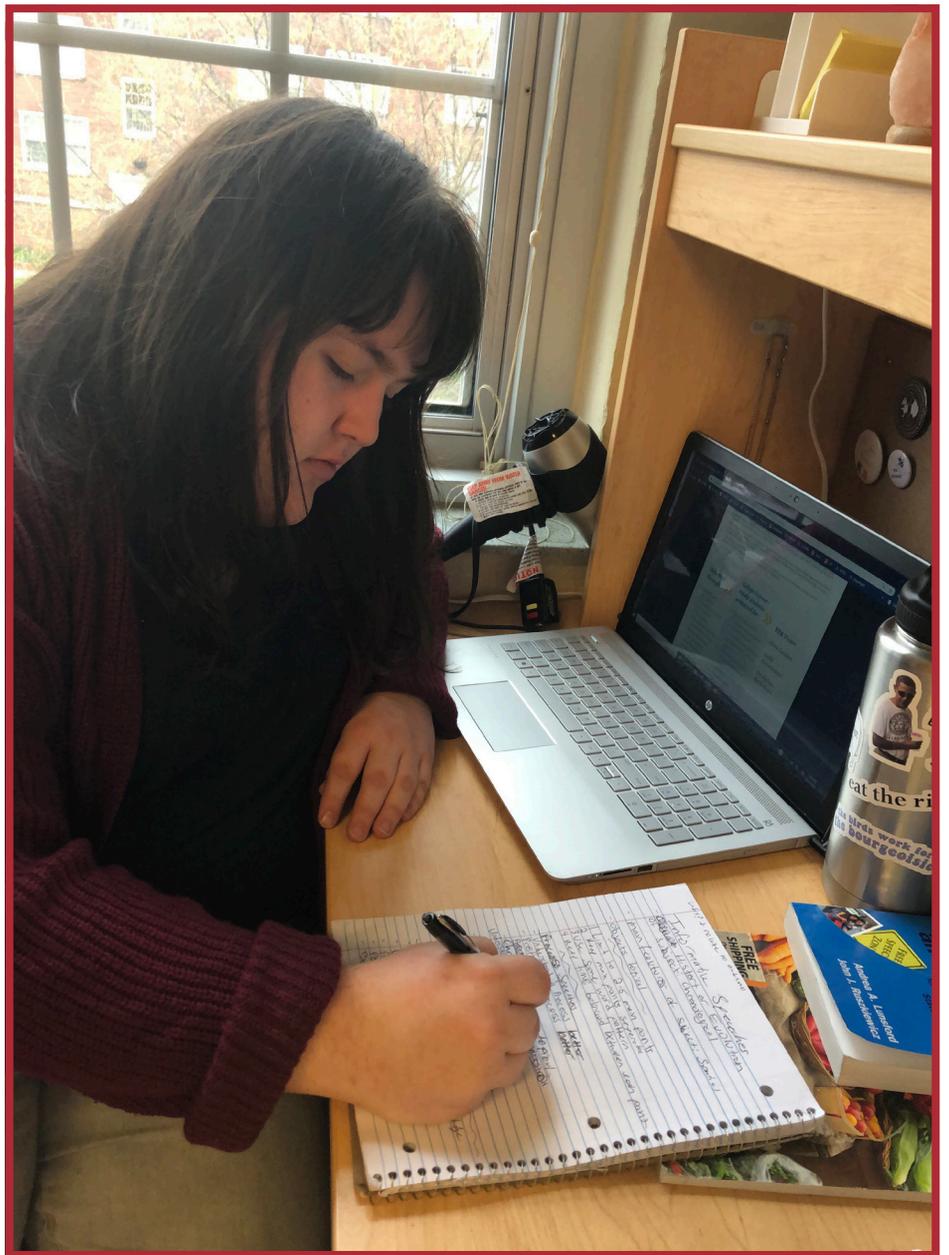
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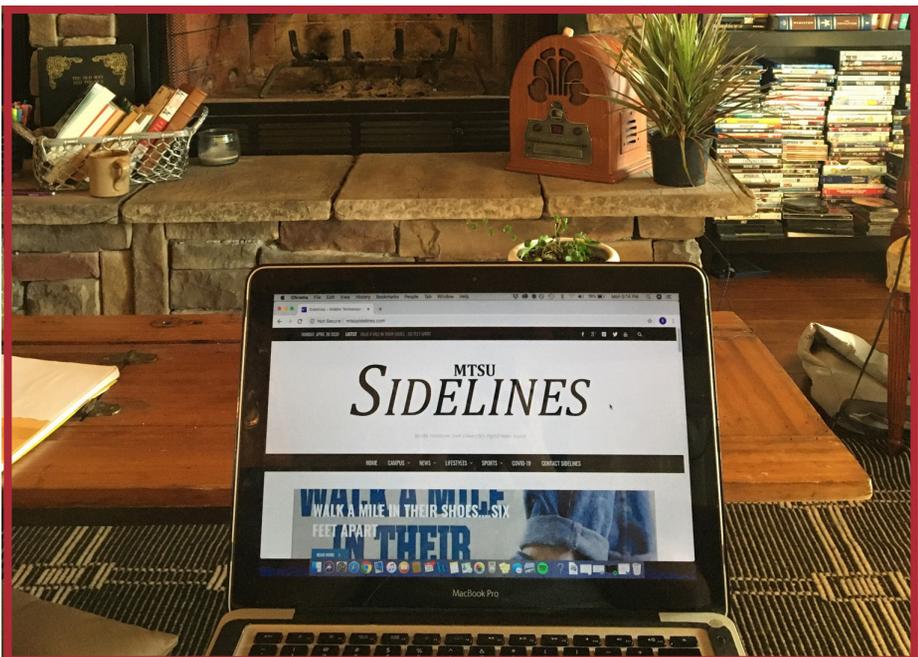
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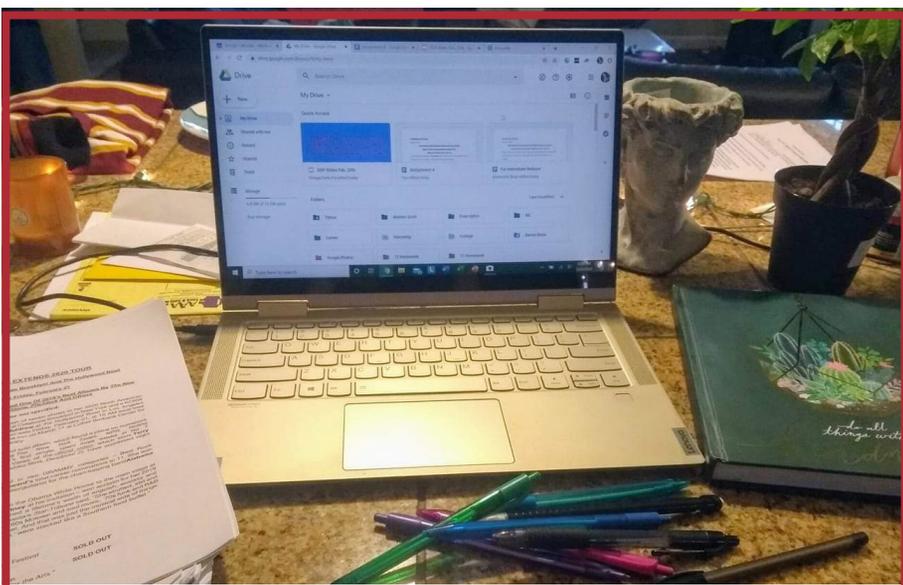
*"Snacks and comfort!"  
Kelsey McDonald*



*"My mom travels for work, so she's currently in Boston, and my dad is currently working on moving to a new house. So really, I don't have a choice. MTSU isn't just where I'm staying during my studies, it's my home."  
Lillian McCulley  
Sophomore*



*Sidelines' Lifestyles Editor Brandon Black  
Junior*



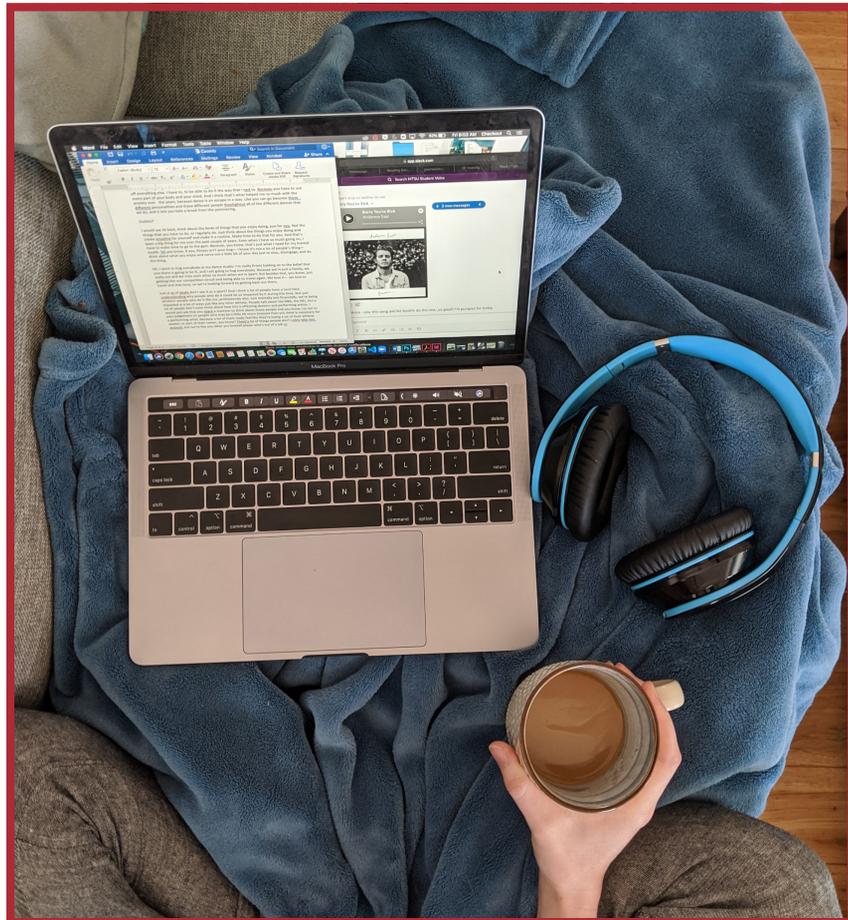
*"I have my laptop, my notes, my agenda, and my cute new plant at my kitchen counter. I also love the lighting of fairy lights so I have some of those around as well."  
Masey Canfield  
Senior*



*Sidelines' Lifestyles Assistant Editor Makayla Boling  
Junior*



*Sidelines' News Editor Savannah Meade  
Senior*



*"Underneath my aesthetically-pleasing blue blanket, I'm actually hiding my Christmas penguin-themed fuzzy socks. They didn't look very professional."  
Sidelines' Editor-in-Chief Angele Latham  
Senior*

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# PARTING GLASS, INTERRUPTED:

## *One final toast from your Editor-in-Chief (or, alternatively, how journalism saved my life.)*

By Angele Latham

“Feminists are men-haters. They just want special treatment.”

“Environmentalists are all liberals.”

“They’re illegal aliens! They should go back where they came from.”

“English is America’s language—stop putting Spanish on products.”

“Was Obama even born here?”

“Stop asking for handouts. It’s not the government’s fault you’re poor.”

“Well if you’d stop breaking the law, you’d stop getting shot by police, wouldn’t you?”

These sentences all touch—with the subtlety and compassion of a wrecking ball—on very specific and incredibly delicate issues. I cringe even typing them, and shrink a little inside seeing them on my screen. And yet, every one of these sentences are sentences that I have said in the past.

Obviously, college has changed me a lot.

Growing up in a very small town in rural,

white, Christian America, I was not exposed to many perspectives about the world. Growing up in a military home exposed me to even fewer than that. The military lifestyle demands a black-and-white view of the world, as such contrast is the only way to function on the battlefield—and consequently, in the home.

To be clear, I never felt particularly impassioned by these views, nor did they ring as truth in my heart—I didn’t actually dislike the aforementioned people, but when you’re only given limited information, how are you to know better? It’s so easy to have strong opinions on people you’ve never met: illegal aliens are all dirty criminals, Obama was a secret foreigner controlled by the Muslim Brotherhood, poor people just want to “mooch off the government,” and feminists are just godless women who show their kneecaps and want to usurp good Christian men’s authority. These were just facts of life to me.

But I’m not writing this story to shame rural America, the military, Christianity, or anyone for that matter. Rather, I’m confessing these things to show the potential in everyone, and why journalism can stop ignorance, one hungry student at a time.

My first experience with journalism that I can clearly remember was not a good one. I was around eight years old, dressed in my Sunday best and standing in gritty sand that was crunching underfoot as I paced back and forth beside stacks of assorted military gear. It was my father’s “ship-out date” for his second deployment, at the height of the Iraq War. The sky was appropriately gray and moody as families lined up to give last goodbyes—babies screaming, kids clutching pant legs and spouses clutching arms even harder.

My family of six was gathered in a corner, hardly making any sound besides our muffled sniffing. We knew the drill. Look stoic (hide the tears), give a brief hug (don’t think about it being your last), and wave goodbye to the back of the bus (pray they’ll return in the same vehicle, and not draped in a flag). This was normal.

What was not normal was the camera I found shoved in my tear-stained face, as a local reporter

asked me ‘how did I feel about my dad leaving for the second time in my young life?’

I recognize now that it must have been a very new reporter who had probably never encountered a stoically sobbing child before, but it still horrifically tainted my view of journalism. (Especially when my classmates told me “How cool it was” that I was on T.V, when all I was watching T.V. for was the ticker at the bottom listing dead soldier’s names. The news always was faster at finding soldier’s identities than the military was at alerting families.)

Thus, my only exposure to journalism was one horrific beginning followed by years of terror, making “the media” synonymous with ever-present death in my mind. Besides, the only news channel I ever watched—which need not be named—told me that “the media” was evil, that liberals were lying to me and that Muslims were taking over America. Based on my very limited experiences with all three of those groups, this seemed perfectly true.

So that was how I grew up, with less of a malicious dislike for others and more of a prideful ignorance forged by the vacuum of misinformation.

And then I entered college, and you can imagine how that went. Everywhere I looked, there were people I was told were bad. Hippies, artists, feminists and activists; people speaking dozens of languages and practicing endless religions. It was an endless stream of differences and it was shocking, particularly because not a single one of them seemed bad.

Was it possible that what I was told was the truth was actually wrong?

*"Everywhere I looked, there were people I was told were bad. It was an endless stream of differences and it was shocking... Was it possible that what I was told was the truth was actually wrong?"*

Within the first week of classes my views were challenged. I met a young Muslim woman at a coffeshop, and instead of taking over America, she gave me extra whipped cream because she liked my shirt. I met a DACA recipient, and instead of being a “dirty



criminal" or a "rapist" like someone influential once said, he excitedly told me about earning a degree in criminal justice so he could fight for immigration reform. Weeks later, I met a young transgender woman who, on the first day that she chose to come to class wearing a beautiful skirt, was shaking so badly that my immediate reaction was to gush over her outfit and offer her a seat.

It was then I realized that I did not truly believe what had been told to me, and that none of these people were who I had been led to believe they were. So what did I believe?

Ironically, my limited view of the world, forged heavily by my military upbringing, is also what urged me to learn more about the world. The need to serve and protect runs deep in military culture, and this stood at odds with what I had been told the world was like. How am I to serve and protect if I cannot care for those whom I serve and protect?

I determinedly set out to learn more—"know your enemy" and such, although the enemy was quickly turning out to be my own understanding. I joined clubs. I met people. I attended rallies and demonstrations, and then I traveled the world and met more people than I ever thought possible.

Whether by accident or a twist of fate, this all inadvertently led me to journalism, and it lit a fire in me. I felt like someone had found me in the dark and handed me a torch. My passion for justice and my deep empathy for people—which had, until now, been dictated by those around me—finally felt like it was free to make a change. I had found my calling, and I suddenly felt invincible.

*"I felt like someone had found me in the dark and handed me a torch... I suddenly felt invincible."*

I met people who had nothing, yet dedicated everything in themselves to causes. I spoke to people who I never thought I would agree with and found common ground. I prayed with people over losses, cheered on others at victories. I cried over every police report of another young woman raped, marched with those advocating for change. I stood toe-to-toe with people armed with hatred and I locked arm-in-arm with those fighting for love. I learned from mistakes and reveled in every bit of good I could bring to someone else.

Journalism has changed me. It has given me a sword with which to wield my passion and fiery determination, and a tool to cut through misinformation. I'm not ashamed of what I used to believe—although they are indeed shameful beliefs—because without those beginnings, I would never be where I am now.

It hurts, sometimes, sure. Sitting among the people I used to think in tune with and speaking against their hatred comes at a cost. But the cost of truth doesn't even come close to the cost of silence, and I truly believe that there are no naturally hateful people out there:

just people who were never given the information to grow.

Feminists aren't men-haters; they just want equality. Environmentalists are just people who believe in saving the world for future generations, regardless of party. Immigrants are so much more than the spiteful label of "illegal aliens"—they are people running from and working for things far beyond anything we can imagine from our privileged seats. English is America's language—as is Spanish, Chinese, French, Italian, Cherokee, and any other of the 400-plus languages spoken here. Obama was born here, and that subtle racism is still racism. People who are asking for handouts are often going through more than they will ever say—be kind. And sometimes, the world is not nearly as black and white as you thought it was.

Henry Luce, a famous magazine journalist, once said "I became a journalist to come as close as possible to the heart of the world," and this quote perfectly encapsulates what journalism has done for me these past four years. The only way to combat hatred is love, and the only way to combat ignorance is information. I hope to be that guiding voice in the future for others who grew up like me, and together we can leave the world a little better.

*So as a note of thanks:*

These past four years and this newspaper have given me so much room to grow and I will never be able to full express my appreciation to everyone who gave me a chance (including you, the reader.)

**Thank you** to my instructors, who saw a spark in me that I never even saw, and fed it into a wildfire. You gave me a purpose when I needed it most.

**Thank you** to my editors, reporters and designers, who allowed me to lead you despite making so many mistakes along the way. I've learned so much from you, and needed your friendship more than you know. Thank you for making this such an amazing experience.

And lastly, **thank you** to my readers for letting me learn from you and with you. Thank you for giving me grace, thank you for letting me stand beside you in solidarity, and thank you for trusting me to hand you the truth.

*Angele Latham*



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